

Making Responsible Choices about Antibiotic Drug Usage in Dairy Cows

Understanding the Role of the Veterinarian

Background

As consumer consciousness about the food system increases, so do the concerns over antibiotic drug use and the potential of drug residue in the dairy industry. It is important for producers and dairy professionals to understand these concerns and make sure that drugs are used responsibly—only when needed to maintain the well-being of the cows. Defining the role of the herd veterinarian is a vital part of responsible drug use. Veterinarians have the training and access to resources that allow them to understand when the use of antibiotics will be beneficial and when they are not needed. Veterinarians can ensure that animals receive appropriate care and food produced from those animals will be safe for human consumption.

The Role of the Veterinarian

Veterinarians have many roles on dairy farms. In addition to examining sick cows, they work with producers to develop farm specific treatment protocols. They train farm personnel to detect disease, identify and record symptoms, and understand when the animal requires examination. Veterinarians also review treatment records to ensure compliance with protocols, and monitor drug inventories and labeling. Most drugs require some level of veterinary supervision. Having a solid relationship with your veterinarian is the basis for maintaining appropriate drug usage and animal care on your farm.

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship

In order for a veterinarian to diagnose, treat or prescribe medications, a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship, or VCPR, must be in effect. A VCPR exists when the veterinarian knows your animals well enough to be able to medically treat them, and the client (the farmer) has agreed to follow the instructions of the veterinarian. A VCPR is established when the veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the health status of animals to diagnosis illnesses. This relationship is maintained through regular farm visits. The VCPR is important because it is required by law in many states. If you have questions about your state's Veterinary Practice Act, contact your state veterinary medical board.

Veterinarian of Record

The veterinarian chosen for the VCPR is known as the Veterinarian of Record. The Veterinarian of Record is responsible for providing oversight of drug treatment, compliance and outcomes on the farm. This includes:

- Establishment of written Rx protocols
- Train personnel to implement Rx protocols
- Supervise extra-label drug usage
- Review treatment records to ensure compliance
- Monitor drug inventories
- Assure proper labels

This veterinarian should also be readily available for follow-up evaluation or has arranged for the following: veterinary emergency coverage, continuing care and treatment. Each farm should work with their Veterinarian of Record to establish a written agreement that defines their role. This agreement will form the basis of ensuring proper usage of drugs and oversight that minimizes the risk of residues milk and meat. Regular farm visits and review of records and lab work are essential to maintain status.

Other Veterinarians

On many larger dairies there may be multiple veterinarians who come to the farm, each with their own role. There may be a technical service veterinarian who provides consulting advice. There may be a veterinarian who supervises the reproduction management. There may be a veterinarian who works in the milking parlor. The Veterinarian of Record is unique to all other veterinarians in that this veterinarian is responsible for all drug usage. All other veterinarians and consultants working on the farm should notify the Veterinarian of Record of their recommendations. Treatment protocols should not be changed by anyone except the Veterinarian of Record.



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